

WE CLAIM:

1. A method of providing access to a communications network to a user supporting a mobile unit capable of wireless communication with at least one access node of a local area network that is capable of connecting to the communications network, comprising the steps of:

a) initially establishing wireless communication between the mobile unit and said at least one access node by associating the mobile unit with said at least one access node;

b) authenticating the user of the mobile unit to enable access to the communications network; and

c) establishing communication with a destination on the communications network, and recording at least some session particulars of a communications session on a server on the communications network during which the mobile unit communicates with the destination.

2. The method of claim 1, wherein the associating step is performed by transmitting an association request from the mobile unit to said at least one access node, and by receiving an association response from said at least one access node at the mobile unit.

3. The method of claim 2, wherein the authenticating step is performed by transmitting an authentication request from the mobile unit to the communications network via said at least one access node associated with the mobile unit, and by receiving an authentication response from the communications network at the mobile unit via said associated at least one access node.

4. The method of claim 3, wherein the step of transmitting the authentication request is initiated by manual action by the user, and validated at an authentication site in the communications network.

5. The method of claim 4, wherein the manual action includes the step of passing a transaction card identifying the user across a card reader on the mobile unit.

6. The method of claim 4; and further comprising the step of positioning a plurality of access nodes of the local area network at spaced-apart locations throughout a venue in which suppliers of information content are situated, and wherein the authentication site validates the authentication request only for a limited number of the access nodes.

7. The method of claim 1, wherein said at least one access node is in wireless communication with the communications network.

8. The method of claim 1, wherein the recording step is performed by recording the session particulars at said at least one access node.

9. The method of claim 1, wherein the destination is a user-selectable database containing information content.

10. The method of claim 1; and further comprising the step of manually selecting, at the mobile unit, a parameter of the communication with the destination.

11. The method of claim 10, wherein the parameter is selected from a group consisting of a session start time, a session stop time, a session duration, session quality of transmission, session usage, databases accessed, number of contacts, location of mobile unit, time of day, traffic class and category, encryption level, session protocol, packet loss, net throughput, transmit power, priority requested and priority granted.

12. The method of claim 1; and further comprising the step of determining one from a plurality of delivery channels along which information content from the destination is delivered to the mobile unit, and the step of displaying the delivered information content on the mobile unit.

13. The method of claim 12, wherein the delivery channels have different parameters, and wherein the determining step includes the step of asking the user to select a desired one of the parameters, and the step of selecting the desired one of the parameters by the user.

14. The method of claim 13, wherein the parameters are at least one of bandwidth, data rate, quality of service, power output, power consumption, cost, traffic class or category, delivery channel characteristics, minimal signal to noise level, and minimal packet delay.

15. The method of claim 13, wherein the asking step includes the step of displaying all the parameters on a display screen on the mobile unit prior to delivering the requested information content.

16. The method of claim 1; and further comprising the step of measuring a remaining amount of time that the mobile unit is able to communicate with said at least one node, and the step of displaying the remaining amount of time on a display screen on the mobile unit.

17. The method of claim 16; and further comprising the step of displaying a total amount of time that the mobile unit has been in communication with said at least one node.

18. The method of claim 12; and further comprising the step of encrypting the information content prior to delivery.

19. The method of claim 12; and further comprising the step of paying for delivery of information content, including the step of presenting the user with different terms of payment by displaying the payment terms on a display screen of the mobile unit; and the step of selecting, by the user, one of the payment terms.

20. The method of claim 19, wherein the step of selecting one of the payment terms includes transmitting a user code to a payment validation site having reference codes, and validating the user code when the user code matches one of the reference codes.

21. The method of claim 1, wherein the recording step is performed by recording additional session particulars at the mobile unit on the network.

22. A method of delivering information network services to a user supporting a mobile unit in a venue, comprising the steps of:

a) providing access nodes of a local area network throughout the venue, the mobile unit being capable of wireless communication with at least one node when located within an operating range therefrom;

b) listening on at least one delivery channel to determine an identity of a wireless local area network protocol in use;

c) configuring the mobile unit to establish wireless communication over said at least one delivery channel with said at least one node pursuant to the protocol;

d) determining a level of authorization and credentials of the user; and

e) delivering a predetermined set of the network services over said at least one delivery channel based on the determined level of authorization and credentials of the user.

23. The method of claim 22; and further comprising the step of recording at least some session particulars of a communications session during which the network services are delivered on a server on the network.

24. The method of claim 23; and further comprising the step of charging content providers for recording the session particulars.